

West Frisian language

West Frisian, or simply **Frisian** (*Frysk* [fris(k)], *Westerlauwersk Frysk*; Dutch: *Westerlauwers Fries* [fris]), is a West Germanic language spoken mostly in the province of Friesland (*Fryslân*) in the north of the Netherlands, mostly by those of Frisian ancestry. It is the most widely spoken of the Frisian languages.

In the study of the evolution of English, West Frisian is notable as being the most closely related foreign tongue to the various dialects of Old English spoken across the Heptarchy, these being part of the Anglo-Frisian branch of the West Germanic family, and is therefore often considered to be in-between English and Dutch — Dutch is widely dubbed in-between the Anglo-Saxon derived components of English and German.

Contents
Name
Speakers
Classification
Dialects
Dialectal comparison
Phonological differences
Lexical differences
History
Old Frisian
Middle Frisian and New Frisian
Alphabet
Phonology
Grammar
Status
Folklore about relation to English
<i>Westerlauwers</i> Frisian
Sample text
See also
References
Further reading
External links

West Frisian	
Frisian	
<i>Frysk</i> <div><i>Westerlauwersk Frysk</i></div>	
Native to	Netherlands
Region	Friesland, Groningen
Ethnicity	West Frisians
Native speakers	470,000 (2001 census) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Indo-European<ul style="list-style-type: none">Germanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">West Germanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ingvaeonic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Anglo-Frisian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Frisian<ul style="list-style-type: none">West Frisian languages<ul style="list-style-type: none">West Frisian</div>
Official status	
Official language in	Netherlands (Province of Friesland)
Regulated by	Fryske Akademy
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	fy (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=fy)
ISO 639-2	fry (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name

Name

The name "West Frisian" is only used outside the Netherlands, to distinguish this language from the closely related Frisian languages of Saterland Frisian and North Frisian spoken in Germany. Within the Netherlands, however, "West Frisian" refers to the West Frisian dialect of the Dutch language while the West Frisian language is almost always just called "Frisian" (in Dutch: *Fries* for the Frisian language and *Westfries* for the Dutch dialect). The unambiguous name used for the West Frisian language by linguists in the Netherlands is *Westerlauwers Fries* ['ʊɛstər, lʌwərs 'fris] (West Lauwers Frisian), the Lauwers being a border river that separates the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Groningen.

Speakers

Most speakers of West Frisian live in the province of Friesland in the north of the Netherlands. Friesland has 643,000 inhabitants (2005), of whom 94% can understand spoken West Frisian, 74% can speak West Frisian, 75% can read West Frisian, and 27% can write it.^[3]

For over half of the inhabitants of the province of Friesland, 55% (c. 354,000 people), West Frisian is the native language. In the central east, West Frisian speakers spill over the province border, with some 4,000–6,000 of them actually living in the province of Groningen, in the triangular area of the villages Marum (West Frisian: *Mearum*), De Wilp (*De Wylp*), and Opende (*De Grinzer Pein*).^[4]

Also, many West Frisians have left their province in the last 60 years for more prosperous parts of the Netherlands. Therefore, possibly as many as 150,000 West Frisian speakers live in other Dutch provinces, particularly in the urban agglomeration in the West, and in neighbouring Groningen and newly reclaimed Flevoland.

A Frisian diaspora exists abroad, with Friesland having sent more emigrants than any other Dutch province between the Second World War and the 1970s. Highest concentrations of Frisian speakers outside the Netherlands are in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Apart from the use of West Frisian as a first language, it is also spoken as a second language by about 120,000 people in the province of Friesland.^[5]


West Frisian is considered by UNESCO to be a language in danger of becoming extinct, officially being listed as "Vulnerable".^[6]

Classification

Not all Frisian varieties spoken in Dutch Friesland are mutually intelligible. The varieties on the islands are rather divergent, and *Glottolog* distinguishes four languages:^[2]

- Hindeloopen-Molkwerum Frisian
- Schiermonnikoog Frisian
- Westlauwers–Terschellings

	e.php?code_ID=150)
ISO 639-3	fry
Glottolog	west2354 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/west2354) ^[2]
Linguasphere	52-ACA-b



Present-day distribution West Frisian languages, in the Netherlands

- Terschelling Frisian
- Mainland West Frisian

Dialects

The dialects of mainland West Frisian are all readily intelligible. Three are usually distinguished:

- Clay Frisian (Klaaifrysk dialect, incl. Westereendersk)
- Wood Frisian (Wâldfrysk dialect)
- South or Southwest Frisian (Súdhoeks dialect)

The *Súdwesthoeksk* ("South Western") dialect, which is spoken in an area called *de Súdwesthoeke* ("the Southwest Corner"), deviates from mainstream West Frisian in that it does not adhere to the so-called newer breaking system, a prominent grammatical feature in the three other main dialects.

The *Noardhoeksk* ("Northern") dialect, spoken in the north eastern corner of the province, does not differ much from Wood Frisian.

By far the two most-widely spoken West Frisian dialects are Clay Frisian (*Klaaifrysk*) and Wood Frisian (*Wâldfrysk*). Both these names are derived from the Frisian landscape. In the western and north-western parts of the province, the region where Clay Frisian is spoken, the soil is made up of thick marine clay, hence the name. While in the Clay Frisian-speaking area ditches are used to separate the pastures, in the eastern part of the province, where the soil is sandy, and water sinks away much faster, rows of trees are used to that purpose. The natural landscape in which Wâldfrysk exists mirrors The Weald and North Weald areas of south-eastern England — the Germanic words *wald* and *weald* are cognate, as is the more generic *wood*.

Although *Klaaifrysk* and *Wâldfrysk* are mutually very easily intelligible, there are, at least to native West Frisian speakers, a few very conspicuous differences. These include the pronunciation of the words *my* ("me"), *dy* ("thee"), *hy* ("he"), *sy* ("she" or "they"), *wy* ("we") and *by* ("by"), and the diphthongs *ei* and *aai*.^[7]

Of the two, *Wâldfrysk* probably has more speakers, but because the western clay area was originally the more prosperous part of the mostly agricultural province, *Klaaifrysk* has had the larger influence on the West Frisian standardised language.

Dialectal comparison

There are few if any differences in morphology or syntax among the West Frisian dialects, all of which are easily mutually intelligible, but there are slight variances in lexicon.^[8]

Phonological differences

The largest difference between the Clay Frisian and Wood Frisian dialects are the words *my* ("me"), *dy* ("you"), *hy* ("he"), *sy* ("she" or "they"), *wy* ("we"), and *by* ("by"), which are pronounced in the Wood Frisian as *mi*, *di*, *hi*, *si*, *wi*, and *bi* and in Clay Frisian as *mij*, *dij*, *hij*, *sij*, *wij*, and *bij*. Other differences are in the pronunciation of the diphthongs *ei*, *ai*, and *aai* which are pronounced *ij*, *ai*, and *aai* in Wood Frisian, but *ôi*, *òì*, and *ôì* in Clay Frisian. Thus, in Wood Frisian, there is no difference between *ei* and *ij*, whereas in Clay Frisian, there is no difference between *ei* and *aai*.

Other phonological differences include:

English	<u>Dutch</u>	Wood Frisian	Clay Frisian
you (singular)	jij	dû	do
plum	pruim	prûm	prom
thumb	duim	tûme	tomme
naked	naakt	nêken	neaken
crack	kraken	krêkje	kreakje
weak (soft)	week	wêk	weak
grass	gras	gjers	gers
cherry	kers	kjers	kers
calf	kalf	kjel	kel

Lexical differences

Some lexical differences between Clay Frisian and Wood Frisian include:

English	Wood Frisian	Clay Frisian
Saturday	saterdei	sneon
ant	mychammel mychhimmel	eamel eamelder
fleece	flij	flues
sow (pig)	mot	sûch

History

Old Frisian

In the early Middle Ages the Frisian lands stretched from the area around Bruges, in what is now Belgium, to the river Weser, in northern Germany. At that time, the Frisian language was spoken along the entire southern North Sea coast. Today this region is sometimes referred to as "Greater Frisia" or *Frisia Magna*, and many of the areas within it still treasure their Frisian heritage, even though in most places the Frisian language has been lost.

Old Frisian bore a striking similarity to Old English. This similarity was reinforced in the late Middle Ages by the Ingvaeonic sound shift, which affected Frisian and English, but the other West Germanic varieties hardly at all. Both English and Frisian are marked by the suppression of the Germanic nasal in a word like *us* (*ús*), *soft* (*sêft*) or *goose* (*goes*): see Ingvaeonic nasal spirant law. Also, when followed by some vowels the Germanic *k* developed into a *ch* sound. For example, the West Frisian for *cheese* and *church* is *tsiis* and *tsjerke*, whereas in Dutch they are *kaas* and *kerk*. Modern English and Frisian on the other hand have become very divergent, largely due to wholesale Norse and French imports into English and similarly heavy Dutch and Low German influences on Frisian.

One major difference between Old Frisian and modern Frisian is that in the Old Frisian period (c. 1150 – c. 1550) grammatical cases still occurred. Some of the texts that are preserved from this period are from the 12th or 13th, but most are from the 14th and 15th centuries. Generally, these texts are restricted to legal documents. Although the earliest definite written examples of Frisian are from approximately the 9th century, there are a few runic inscriptions from the region which are probably older and possibly in the Frisian language. These runic writings, however, usually do not amount to more than single- or few-word inscriptions, and cannot be said to constitute literature as such. The Middle Frisian language period (c. 1550 – c. 1820) is rooted in geopolitics and the consequent fairly abrupt halt in the use of Frisian as a written language.

Middle Frisian and New Frisian

Up until the 16th century West Frisian was widely spoken and written, but from 1500 onwards it became an almost exclusively oral language, mainly used in rural areas. This was in part due to the occupation of its stronghold, the Dutch province of Friesland (*Fryslân*), in 1498, by Albert III, Duke of Saxony, who replaced West Frisian as the language of government with Dutch.

This practice was continued under the Habsburg rulers of the Netherlands (Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, and his son Philip II, King of Spain). When the Netherlands became independent in 1585, West Frisian did not regain its former status, because Holland rose as the dominant part of the Netherlands and its language, Dutch, as the dominant language in judicial, administrative and religious affairs.

In this period the Frisian poet Gysbert Japiks (1603–1666), a schoolteacher and cantor from the city of Bolsward (*Boalsert*), who largely fathered modern West Frisian literature and orthography, was an exception to the rule.

His example was not followed until the 19th century, when entire generations of Frisian authors and poets appeared. This coincided with the introduction of the so-called newer breaking system, a prominent grammatical feature in almost all West Frisian dialects, with the notable exception of *Súdwesthoeksk*. Therefore, the New Frisian period is considered to have begun at this time, around 1820.

Alphabet

West Frisian uses the Latin alphabet. A, E, O and U may be accompanied by circumflex or acute accents.

In alphabetical listings both I and Y are usually found between H and J. When two words differ only because one has I and the other one has Y (such as *stikje* and *stykje*), the word with I precedes the one with Y.

In handwriting, IJ (used for Dutch loanwords and personal names) is written as a single letter (see IJ (digraph)), whereas in print the string IJ is used. In alphabetical listings IJ is most commonly considered to consist of the two letters I and J, although in dictionaries there is an entry IJ between X and Z telling the user to browse back to I.

Phonology

Grammar

Status

In 1951, Frisian language activists, protesting at the exclusive use of Dutch in the courts, caused a riot in Leeuwarden.^[9] The resulting inquiry led to the establishment of a committee of inquiry. This committee recommended that the Frisian language should receive legal status as a minority language.^[10]

Since 1956, West Frisian has an official status along with and equal to Dutch in the province of Friesland. It is used in many domains of Frisian society, among which are education, legislation, and administration. In 2010, some sixty public transportation ticket machines in Friesland and Groningen added a West Frisian-language option.^[11]

Although in the courts of law the Dutch language is still mainly used, in the province of Friesland, Frisians have the right to give evidence in their own language. Also, they can take the oath in Frisian in courts anywhere in the Netherlands.

Primary education in Friesland was made bilingual in 1956, which means West Frisian can be used as a teaching medium. In the same year, West Frisian became an official school subject, having been introduced to primary education as an optional extra in 1937. It was not until 1980, however, that West Frisian had the status of a required subject in primary schools, and not until 1993 that it was given the same position in secondary education.

In 1997, the province of Friesland officially changed its name from the Dutch form *Friesland* to the West Frisian *Fryslân*. So far 6 out of 31 municipalities (*Dantumadiel*, *Tytsjerksteradiel*, *Boarnsterhim*, *Littenseradiel*, *Wûnseradiel* and *Ferwerderadiel*) have changed their official geographical names from Dutch to West Frisian. Some other municipalities, like Heerenveen and the 11 towns, use two names (both Dutch and West Frisian) or only a West Frisian name.

Within ISO 639 West Frisian falls under the codes *fy* and *fry*, which were assigned to the collective Frisian languages.

Folklore about relation to English

The saying "As milk is to cheese, are English and Fries" describes the observed similarity between Frisian and English. One rhyme that is sometimes used to demonstrate the palpable similarity between Frisian and English is "Bread, butter and green cheese is good English and good Fries", which sounds not very different from "*Brea, bûter en griene tsiis is goed Ingelsk en goed Frysk*".^[12]

Another rhyme on this theme, "*Bûter, brea en griene tsiis; wa't dat net sizze kin is gjin oprjochte Fries*" (🔊 example ; in English, "Butter, bread and green cheese, whoever can't say that is no genuine Frisian") was used, according to legend, by the 16th century Frisian rebel and pirate Pier Gerlofs Donia as a shibboleth that he forced his captives to repeat to distinguish Frisians from Dutch and Low Germans.

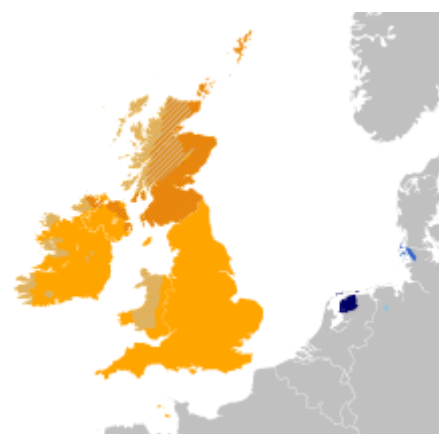
Westerlauwers Frisian

0:00 / 0:00

Spoken West Frisian



Bilingual West Frisian–Dutch signs in Hindeloopen



Anglo-Frisian languages in Europe

West Frisian can be confused with an area (or its local language, which is a dialect of Dutch) in the Dutch province Noord-Holland (in Dutch: area = West-Friesland or local language = West-Fries); that is why the term *Westlauwersk Frysk* or Westerlauwers Frisian for the proper West Frisian language has been introduced. The River Lauwers is the part of the border between the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Groningen.

In the Netherlands, West Frisian can refer to the local language spoken in the regions of Hoorn, Enkhuizen and Medemblik.


Sample text

Below is the Lord's Prayer from the Frisian Bible third edition, published in 1995, with the corresponding English text from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (see also Frisian languages#The Lord's Prayer).

*Us Heit yn 'e himel,
lit jo namme hillige wurde,
lit jo keninkryk komme,
lit jo wil dien wurde
op ierde likegoed as yn 'e himel.
Jou ús hjoed ús deistich brea
en ferjou ús ús skulden
sa't wy ús skuldners ek ferjûn hawwe;
en lit ús net yn fersiking komme,
mar ferlos ús fan 'e kweade;
want jowes is it keninkryk
en de krêft
en de hearlikheid
oant yn ivichheid. Amen.*

Our Father, which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power,
and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

See also

- Frisia
- Frisian languages
- Frisian Islands
- Frisians
- Frisian literature
- Languages of the Netherlands
-  Swadesh list with English and Frisian words

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Further reading

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External links

- [Frisian languages](https://curlie.org/Reference/Dictionaries/World_Languages/F/Frisian/) (https://curlie.org/Reference/Dictionaries/World_Languages/F/Frisian/) at Curlie
- [ISO 639 code set entry for "fry"](http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.asp?id=fry) (<http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.asp?id=fry>) and for "fri" (<http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.asp?id=fri>) (active and retired language codes, respectively)
- [Course West Frisian](http://www.allezhop.de/frysk/) (<http://www.allezhop.de/frysk/>)
- [Wet gebruik Friese taal](http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0034047/) (2013) (<http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0034047/>). overheid.nl. - 2013 legislation concerning the Frisian language

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